

Business, Enterprise and Employment Support for Women in South Asia Network (Guarantee) Limited

Knowledge Hub Webinar Series

Mobilizing for Justice: Women's Responses to Institutional Failures In Addressing Gender-Based Discrimination 17th December 2024

The second webinar in the series inspired by the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence campaign, explored the resilience and agency of women responding to institutional failures. It highlighted their collective power to challenge systemic inequities and reframe the narrative, portraying women as powerful agents of change. Below is a synthesis of the key themes and findings:

Intergenerational Feminism: Building Bridges, Driving Change (Ms. Rita Thapa, Feminist Activist and Philanthropist, Nepal)

- **Context:** Women in Nepal face compounded challenges, including systemic marginalization, inadequate leadership representation, and digital divides.
- **Initiatives:**
 - *Intergenerational Feminist Forum (IGFF):* Collaborative platform for feminist awareness and action.
 - *Anupam Abhiyan Movement:* Grassroots campaigns, feminist song competitions, and a Women's Empowerment Fund to ensure independence from donor influence.
- **Learnings:** Limited leadership roles (1%) for women underscore the importance of grassroots mobilization and systemic change.

Beyond the Silence (Ms. Raheema Adam, Founder Member, Association of Lady Entrepreneurs (ALE), Maldives)

- **Context:** GBV, restrictive cultural norms, and weak legal systems constrain women's agency in the Maldives.
- **Interventions:**
 - *Life Coaching and Mentorship:* Building confidence and decision-making skills.
 - *Entrepreneurship Support:* Providing tools and training for financial independence.
 - *Legal Advocacy:* Raising awareness of rights and navigating systemic challenges.
- **Impact:** ALE's initiatives have empowered women to establish businesses and overcome societal barriers.

Women's Empowerment through Microfinance (Ms. Bushra Khanum, Head of Gender Empowerment and Social Advocacy, Kashf Foundation, Pakistan)

- **Context:** High rates of GBV, mobility challenges, and economic inequities persist across South Asia.
- **Interventions:** Adopting a “microfinance plus” approach, integrating financial services with social development.
- **Key Initiatives:**
 - Tailored financial products, vocational training, and social advocacy campaigns.
 - Business management programs benefiting over 1.8 million women.
- **Outcomes:** Women have gained financial independence, leading to societal shifts in gender roles.

Key Recommendations

1. **State Recognition and Accountability:** Governments must recognize women’s labor rights as fundamental and address institutional failures while safeguarding feminist movements.
 2. **Education for Girls:** Enforce compulsory education to reduce dropout rates, empower girls, and delay early marriages.
 3. **Promoting Gender Justice:** Invest in programs that dismantle systemic barriers and empower women as change agents.
 4. **Grassroots and Regional Solidarity:** Strengthen grassroots movements and foster cross-regional collaboration for community-driven solutions.
 5. **Legal and Systemic Reforms:** Facilitate regional collaborations to advocate for legal frameworks and systemic reforms supporting gender justice.
 6. **Amplifying Women’s Agency:** Elevate women's leadership and resilience, reframing them as transformative agents of change.
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Detailed Analysis

The webinar delved into the pervasive challenges women face due to institutional failures in addressing gender-based violence and systemic marginalization. Presenters shared insights on how entrenched societal norms perpetuate inequities, often portraying women as passive victims rather than agents of change.

The session explored innovative initiatives in South Asia. In Nepal, grassroots movements like the Intergenerational Feminist Forum have mobilized communities across districts to advocate for feminist principles and systemic reforms. In the Maldives, the Association of Lady Entrepreneurs (ALE) demonstrated how mentorship and skill-building programs are breaking down cultural and legal barriers, enabling women to overcome vulnerabilities and achieve financial independence. Pakistan’s Kashf Foundation showcased the transformative potential of microfinance, which has empowered millions of women through financial literacy, vocational training, and media advocacy campaigns.

Despite these successes, the presenters highlighted the significant gaps in leadership representation, societal support, and policy implementation. They called for collective efforts to address these challenges and promote self-reliant, women-led movements.

Conclusion

The webinar emphasized the critical role of women's agency and collective power in addressing systemic inequities. It underscored that gender justice cannot be achieved through policy reforms alone but requires grassroots mobilization, cross-regional solidarity, and investments in feminist action.

By showcasing the resilience and leadership of women in South Asia, this session demonstrated the potential for transformative change when women are empowered to lead their own narratives. The discussions served as a call to action for stakeholders across sectors to invest in and amplify the voices of women as formidable agents of change.